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THE STORY OF CATULLUS

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TO

HENRY ELFORD LUXMOORE

AND

JOHN FOSTER CRACE

I OFFER

WITH AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE

THESE VERSIONS OF

CATULLUS

PREFACE

WHO will read this book? A scholar here and there, I dare to hope, who would not willingly pass by anything that concerns Catullus, a barrister, a business-man (who knows?), if, as I believe, there are still some who find, after a long day's work, their best refreshment in the classics.

Perhaps even an Eton boy who has read Catullus at school, and is a little ashamed at having cared so much for any part of his work, or the sister of an Eton boy, if I may speak out all my dreams, who has read in Tennyson of the 'tenderest of Roman poets,' and would learn something which her brother refuses to tell of that Catullus 'whose dead songster never dies.' May it be so! And

if not, it is something only to have dreamed it, and still more to know that the leisure moments of the last five years which have been given to Catullus have been their own exceeding rich reward. But what will my publishers say?

There remains a deep debt of gratitude to discharge. Every modern editor of the classics enters upon a rich inheritance in the labours of his predecessors: it is a pleasure even to acknowledge what one cannot hope to repay. My special thanks are due to the Provost of Eton who first taught me to love Catullus; to Munro, the greatest of English scholars; to Professor Ellis, whose edition of the poet will always remain unrivalled; to Professor Tyrrell for his delightful essay on Catullus among the Latin poets, and for his brilliant sketch of Marcus Caelius Rufus in 'The Correspondence of Cicero'; to Mackail's Latin Literature; to the German editions of Schmidt and Riese; to Professors Merrill

and Simpson; above all, to the Vice-Provost of Eton for his kindness in reading through the proofs, and for many corrections and suggestions, to my friend and colleague Mr. A. B. Ramsay for invaluable help and criticism, and to my sisters for the encouragement and the sympathy which only sisters can give.

INDEX OF POEMS TRANSLATED

POEM	PAGE	POEM	PAGE
I.	16	LVIII.	27
II.	14	LXI.	58
III.	15	LXV.	43
V.	13	LXX.	21
VII.	11	LXXII.	22
VIII.	34	LXXIII.	25
IX.	17	LXXV.	23
XI.	75	LXXVI.	39
XXXI.	47	LXXVII.	25
XXXIV.	18	LXXXII.	24
XXXVIII.	42	LXXXIV.	38
XLV.	71	LXXXV.	36
XLVI.	45	LXXXVII.	79
XLVIII.	12	XC.	64
XLIX.	66	XCV.	55
L.	51	CI.	50
LI.	9	CVII.	33
LI*a*.	11	CIX.	20
LII.	53		

THE STORY OF CATULLUS

VERONA has always been a famous city. It is well known in modern Italian history as a fortress of the great Austrian Quadrilateral, and in the struggle between Guelphs and Ghibellines it played no unimportant part. Nor has it lacked distinction in the arts of peace. The church of San Zenone, the tomb of Can Grande and his successors, the market-place unequalled in all Italy, and the innumerable Renaissance palaces, all combine to give to the birthplace of Romeo and Juliet a charm which few other cities possess. And even in Roman days it had a clear title to fame. For here in the year 84 B.C., when the Republic was already tottering to its fall, was born Gaius Valerius Catullus, the tenderest and fiercest of all Italian poets.

Verona was a flourishing city at that time, and the father of Catullus was not only a man of wealth and importance in his native town, but also a friend, perhaps an intimate friend, of Gaius Julius Caesar himself. Little though the Romans cared for scenery, the boy Catullus can hardly have failed to love the beautiful city with the mountains beyond and the noble river sweeping with a great curve through the heart of it; but the hopes of all men of genius and ambition were centred in Rome, and Catullus fixed on the capital as his residence as soon as he was of an age to choose for himself. Possibly his brother may already have left his father's house, and this may have influenced the young poet in his decision. Of the early years at Verona no record remains; but we may infer from the later poems that the two brothers loved each other from childhood, and shared the same hopes and ambitions. Of his father and his mother,

strangely enough, Catullus has nothing to say; but it is possible that the poet's fierce attacks on Julius Caesar, his father's friend, imply some lack of sympathy between father and son. In any case, whatever the reason, Catullus left Verona and came to Rome. If, as seems probable, this was in the year 62 B.C., Cicero, who had saved Rome from Catiline only a few months before, was at the height of his fame; Caesar, plunged apparently beyond redemption in debt, was at the same time the most popular man in Rome, soon to be appointed Pontifex Maximus in spite of his avowed scepticism; Lucretius the poet was as yet unknown, though ten years older than Catullus; Virgil was a child of eight, Horace a baby of three. Two other men, less famous, but more intimately connected with Catullus, deserve mention here: Calvus, orator and poet, who was two years younger than his friend Catullus, and Marcus Caelius Rufus, who, curiously enough, was

born the same day of the same year as Calvus, and, like him, was the dear friend of our poet until the treachery of Rufus turned friendship into hate.

Women at this time had begun to play an important part at Rome, and to exercise a wider influence on politics and society, but the great Roman ladies did not for the most part use their influence for good; indeed, women and men seem to have vied with each other in shamelessness in that strangely profligate age. It was to a city seething with intrigue and discontent, where unbridled passions and adulteries were commonplace, that the young poet came, who, though he had written many love poems, had probably never seriously fallen in love. How long he lived in Rome before the tragedy of his life began it is impossible to say; much that is ignoble and shameful in his writings should, I believe, be referred to the first year of liberty, when, freed from the restraints

of home, he took his share in the pleasures of the great city. The discussion of a poet's vices is always unprofitable, yet it is due to Catullus to protest against the view which assigns the vilest of his poems to the last years of his life. Possibly it was early in 61 B.C. that Catullus was first introduced to Clodia, then in the full beauty of her womanhood. As the wife of Q. Metellus Celer, consul-elect in 61, she was probably the most influential woman in Rome; and Catullus, intoxicated by her rank and beauty, yielded without a struggle to the fascination of her resistless eyes. The poet has given us no details of her face or form: it is enough to know what he felt in her presence. She was a goddess for him, and he worshipped. It is hard for us to put ourselves in Catullus' place, to realise that he looked upon his love as white and innocent, so that he could compare his mistress to Laodamia, the type of pure womanhood, though Clodia came to

him from the arms of her rightful husband. But Catullus himself glories in this very fact, unconscious of his shame; and if we are to understand his life we must accept the startling truth that he regarded himself as Clodia's true husband, and believed that his conduct to her had been free from all reproach and stain. The wrong done to the 'dolt' husband he appears never to have considered at all. That Catullus sinned, judged even by the lax standard of his own day, needs no proof; it is not so obvious, but it is not less true, that he lived and died unconscious of his guilt. And this, at least, may be urged in his excuse: if Catullus had loved Clodia lightly, and as lightly left her to marry some one else, Roman society would have approved. When Marcus Caelius Rufus fell in love with Clodia, and then wearied of her, Cicero enlarged on the inevitable wild oats theory, and every one (except Clodia) seems to have been satisfied;

but the sorrow of Catullus was not less violent than his passion, and may have helped to hasten his untimely death. No one has ever accused him of being a hypocrite; yet in his passionate appeal to the gods, when he reviews his past life, an appeal which must carry conviction to every unprejudiced heart, he speaks of loyal service and unsullied faith, and because of these he claims heavenly pity as his right. Our pity, too, he can surely claim: the young, impressionable poet in his twenty-third year was ill-matched against the most brilliant and beautiful woman in Rome, whose infinite wit and variety age could not wither nor custom stale. Surely never were more hopeless odds. It would need a strong character to resist temptation such as this, and Catullus was very human, very ready to love or hate, but little able to resist or endure.

We do not know under what circumstances he was introduced to Clodia, but we

have the first poem which he wrote to her in the rapture of his early love, a translation from Sappho. There is, one cannot help feeling, a bathos in this: was the young lover so incapable of finding words of his own to give expression to his passion that he was driven to take refuge in a version of a poem written by a Greek poetess to a girl? It may indeed be urged that the language of great poets is eternally true. If we turn to Shakespeare, Troilus expecting Cressida says:

'My heart beats quicker than a feverous pulse:
And all my powers do their bestowing lose,
Like vassalage at unawares encountering
The eye of majesty.'

When Cressida comes to him he can only say:

'You have bereft me of all words, lady,'

and Catullus, or rather Sappho before him,

says much the same. But this explanation may be only part of the truth. What if Catullus had seen Clodia, had fallen in love with her at first sight, and wished to convey his secret to her in a way which she could hardly misunderstand, if she cared for him, and yet could not resent if, after all, his hopes were vain? In the eyes of the world a translation would be sufficient disguise, and this poem breathes too rapturous a devotion to be mistaken by Clodia, if she shared at all the feelings of him who wished to be her poet. The poem, as we have it, is a mere fragment: only three stanzas remain, and of the second stanza some words are lost. This is the first message which some friend of Catullus and Clodia carried from him to her:

LI.

He is the peer of gods for me,
Victor of gods, if that may be,
Who face to face at whiles on thee
May gaze and hear

Thy laughter sweet: ah! Lesbia thence
(Unhappy me!) fails every sense,
Fails voice and art, for evidence
That thou art near.

My tongue is numb: the fever flies
From limb to limb: sounds tinkling rise
Within my brain: on both my eyes
The night falls sheer.

Catullus speaks of Lesbia in the second stanza, though the word does not occur in Sappho's poem; but the original was written to a Lesbian girl, and the name is thus suggested to Catullus, who adopts it once and for all. Clodia henceforth is Lesbia to him.

In the original a fourth stanza follows the other three, but it is evidently out of place, for it makes havoc of the context, and gives a simple and convincing sense if taken by itself:

LI.

In idleness, Catullus, hurt you cherished,
Long idleness to wanton riot grown:
Through idleness aforetime kings have perished
With all the pomp of cities overthrown.

In the original this stanza is in the same metre as the other three, hence the waif has been attached to them.

For the first two years the course of love ran smooth, and lyric after lyric bore witness to the poet's happiness.

'As many kisses as be stars in heaven'

is his answer to Lesbia, who has asked what number will content him.

VII.

You ask how many kisses can fulfil
Your kisses, Lesbia, or exceed my will.
As many grains as are of Libyan sand
By rich Cyrene in the silphium land

Between Jove's sultry oracle and where
Stands ancient Battus' sacred sepulchre:
Or many as the stars whose light discovers,
When night is hushed, the stealthy tryst of lovers:
So many of your kisses can fulfil
Love-rapt Catullus or exceed his will,
Beyond the count of jealous tongues to tell
Or prying eyes to blight with envious spell.

The next is an earlier poem, not addressed to Lesbia, but a place may be found for it here:

XLVIII.

If ever one should grant me this
Still still your honeyed eyes to kiss,
I'd kiss a million times, and still
Still ask, nor hope to have my fill,
Though kisses one for every ear
Of sunny corn were garnered here.

Or again, when he would prove to Lesbia that life is worth living for lovers alone:

V.

Live we to love, my Lesbia; then
All talk of elder, sourer men
We'll value at a single mite.
Suns set to rise: when sets the day
For us but once with hasty ray,
We sleep, and all is endless night.
A thousand kisses, then five score,
Another thousand, a hundred more,
Then one for each you gave before;
Then, as the many thousands grow,
We'll wreck the counting lest we know,
Or lest an evil eye prevail
Through knowledge of the kisses' tale.

But the two poems on Lesbia's sparrow are perhaps the best known of all. It is interesting to compare the first of these with a passage in *Romeo and Juliet*:

Jul. "'Tis almost morning: I would have thee gone:
And yet no further than a wanton's bird;

Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silk thread plucks it back
again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty.

Rom. I would I were thy bird!

Jul. Sweet, so would I.'

Whereas Catullus does not wish that he were Lesbia's sparrow, but that he might play with it as Lesbia loves to play.

II.

Sparrow, the plaything of my fair,
Whom in her lap she loves to bear,
Or with raised finger-tip excites
Till wickedly he pecks and bites;
When the bright lady of my yearning
To some dear dainty play is turning,
Sweet solace for love's pain, I trow,
Or in the lull of passion's glow,
Oh! might I play with you as she,
And my heart's burden lighter be.

The second lyric, that mourns the sparrow's death, is still more beautiful :

III.

Oh ! Loves and Cupids make lament ;
Men of the lovelier lives consent.
Mourn for my lady's sparrow fled,
My lady's playmate sparrow dead,
Her joy beyond the light of eyes,
So honey-sweet was he and wise
To know her as a girl her mother.
He would not leave her for another,
Would on her lap be still astir
And still be chirping but for her.
Now fares he thither whence they say
None e'er retraced the darkling way.
Cursed shades, I curse you ravening
From Orcus for each dainty thing :
The dainty pet ye ravished here !
Ah, cruel deed ! ah, birdie dear !
For thee to-day with flushing eyes
And heavy lids my darling cries.

Probably one volume of poems was published by Catullus under the title of *The Sparrow*: Lesbia must have inspired all or most of these. Another volume was dedicated to a friend, Cornelius Nepos, an amiable man, but the most unsympathetic and unimaginative of historians. If the dedication seems a little commonplace now, it is only because it has been so often imitated.

I.

So new, so smooth, my dainty book,
A gift for whom? Cornelius, look,
'Tis yours; for you in early days
Were ever wont my rhymes to praise,
While setting forth in volumes three,
First of our race, all history.
O heavens! the lore, the labour there!
Therefore the book, how slight soe'er
It be, be yours: nor, guardian Muse,
Do thou unaging age refuse.

There is some doubt as to the reading of the

last two lines; by a very slight change we get the meaning:

Your name shall give
The right unagingly to live.

This has more point, but the sudden invocation of the Muse is not unnatural, and no change is really necessary.

Catullus, as we shall see, was not only a true lover: he was also a true friend. And he looks forward to the home-coming of Veranius with something of the rapture which the thought of Lesbia inspires.

IX.

Is it you, my friend of friends, who come
Dearer to me than a million others,
Veranius, home to your hearth and home,
The aged mother, the loving brothers?
You have come! ah, joy, it is well, it is well!
I shall see you safe, I shall hear you tell
(You best know how) of Hiberian races
And the deeds they do, and the storied places,

And drawing your neck to my own the while,
I shall kiss the face and the eyes that smile.
Oh! hearts that are happy above the rest,
Is any so happy as I, so blest?

In striking contrast to these light themes and dainty songs follows the noble ode to Diana, written by Catullus to be sung by girls and boys. It has the charm, which no poem of Catullus lacks, of simplicity and directness, but it has also a dignity and religious feeling which enshrine it apart from all the rest. The first and last stanzas are sung by the boys and girls together, the second and third probably by the boys alone, and the fourth and fifth by the girls.

XXXIV.

In Dian's hand are we
Girls and boys fancy-free:
Fancy-free raise acclaim,
Boys and girls, to Dian's name.

Daughter of Lato's love,
High child of highest Jove,
Whom she that bore thee laid
Under Delos' olive shade,

To hold in thy demesne
Mountain and forest green,
Where nestle glades unseen,
Where the rivers thunder, Queen.

Hailed thou in travail-hour
Juno, light-giving power,
Throned at the meeting ways,
Hailed the Moon with borrowed rays.

Thou, as each month thy sphere
Measures the gliding year,
Goddess, with goodly store
Fillest full the farmer's floor.

Named here as is thy will,
Hallowed be thou, and still
Blessed as aforetime be
Sons of Romulus by thee.

In the year 59 came the change. Clodia's husband, Quintus Metellus, died, and Clodia, who had grown tired of him long ago, had perhaps begun already to weary of Catullus. Suspicion at least of unfaithfulness must have prompted the lines in which Catullus still fondly prays for a lifetime consecrated to a love as pure and noble as that which binds two friends together.

CIX.

A happy love, my life, your lips foreshow
For you and me a love without an end—
Oh! gods above me, may the truth be so,
And all she vows may all her heart intend!
Then should one love fulfil the years, and know
The sacred union linking friend to friend.

Clodia seems indeed at one time to have promised to marry the poet, or at least to have wished that she were free to do so;

but Catullus soon had reason to mistrust her promises.

LXX.

None else but me, my lady vows 'tis true,
None else for her though Jove himself should sue;
She vows, a woman to her lover: grave
Such words upon the wind and fleeting wave!

Again we are reminded of Shakespeare in *Troilus and Cressida*:

'What says she there?
Words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart.'

Then, as Troilus tears the letter—

'Go wind to wind, there turn and change together.
My love with words and errors still she feeds.'

And soon the faithlessness is all too clearly proved. Catullus cannot bless her, nor pray for her, but, alas ! he does not love her less.

LXXII.

'Catullus only,' Lesbia, once you said,
Not Jove himself would please you in my stead.
Sire's love to son or daughter's husband then
I gave you, not the common love of men.
I know you now, the fiercer burns my flame,
Yet lighter, lower, far I prize your fame.
You question how? so wronged, a lover's mind
Kindles perforce the more, but grows less kind.

There is something infinitely pathetic about this poem; for it proves that Catullus was ready to give to Lesbia the chivalrous

love, whose first aim is not the selfish satisfaction of desire, but the wish that it may be well with the loved one for her own sake. And he feels that he has fallen from this high ideal, and declined to the lower level of sensual passion; he is beginning to realise that the best gift which a woman might have given, and which alone could have brought him real happiness, has been by Lesbia's sinning irrecoverably lost. The next poem repeats the same thought.

LXXV

Lesbia, to this your sin has brought my mind,
Lost in its own devotion, lost and blind;
I cannot bless you, golden though you prove,
Though you do anything, I still must love.

The short poem which follows is addressed to Quintius, possibly a fellow-townsman of Catullus, who is threatening his happiness.

LXXXII.

If you would have Catullus be your debtor
for the light,
The light of eyes, or if there be a dearer
thing than sight,
Ah! Quintius, spare to rob your friend of
one far dearer prize
Than light of eyes, or if there be a dearer
light than eyes.

Probably there were many rivals now: certainly there was one who gave Catullus more pain than all the rest. For Clodia had begun to notice Marcus Caelius Rufus, the poet's friend, who attracted her not only as a young man of exceptional promise and headstrong ambition, but also as the best dancer in Rome. And so in one moment Catullus lost his mistress and his friend. On that friend he turned with an exceeding bitter cry, which might have given even

Rufus pause, reckless and unprincipled as he was, for all his superficial attractiveness.

LXXVII.

Rufus, the friend I trusted so for naught—
For naught? ah! no, for shame that leaves me sad;
You the dark thief to sear my soul who wrought
And reft me, reft of all the joys I had,
You the fell poison of my happy day,
You, you upon whose breast my friendship lay.

Another poem, probably due to the treachery and ingratitude of the same friend, belongs to this time:

LXXIII.

Believe no more that service gains a friend,
Nor dream that any man may faithful be.
Has love reward? is gratitude the end?

Nay, hurt and harm—at least 'tis so for me,
Most harried by his hate who once would call
Me, me his only friend, his own, his all.

Rufus indeed would not hear, but 'The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us,' and so a few years afterwards Rufus was brought to trial on a charge of poisoning, by Clodia's latest victim, a boy, who to prove his loyalty to his mistress endeavoured to ruin the former lover. Rufus, it is true, defended by Cicero, was acquitted, but during that anxious time, if the words of Catullus, 'You the fell poison of my happy day,' were not quite forgotten, he must have felt that there was a charge of poisoning to which he could hardly plead 'not guilty.'

Yet Catullus seems to have forgiven him at last: no one could help forgiving Rufus. And in proof of forgiveness or forgetfulness

it is to Caelius Rufus that a later poem is dedicated, in which the poet mourns over Lesbia's final degradation:

LVIII.

The peerless Lesbia, Caelius, Lesbia mine,
Lesbia the peerless, whom Catullus' heart
Dearer than self and kin did once enshrine,
Now in the streets and alleys plays her part
And snares the noble sons of Remus' line.

It is interesting to notice that Shakespeare's record of his own love and friendship recalls, if we may trust the sonnets, in almost every particular the experience of Catullus. 'There can be no reasonable doubt that in the early days of his relation with the young maid-of-honour, Shakespeare felt himself a favourite of fortune, intoxicated with love and happiness, exalted above his station, honoured and enriched.' So writes Dr. George Brandes in his critical study of Shakespeare, and no

words could better explain one aspect of the love of Catullus for Clodia.

'She must have brought a breath from a higher world, an aroma of aristocrat womanhood into his life. He must have admired her wit, her presence of mind, and her daring, her capricious fancy, and her quickness of retort. He must have studied, enjoyed, and adored in her—and that in the closest intimacy—the well-bred ease, the sportive coquetry, the security, elegance, and gaiety of the emancipated lady.' Here again the same words might be used without a single change to describe the relations between Clodia and Catullus. We may even go further than this, and contrast or compare in face as well as in character the two women loved by the two poets. With all deference to Mr. Sidney Lee, it has, I think, been proved that Shakespeare's love, the dark lady of the sonnets, was Mary Fitton, maid-of-honour to Queen Elizabeth. Her eyes

we know well from Shakespeare's description, 'my mistress' eyes are raven black'; her hair, too, he tells us, is black. She is not beautiful, yet 'beauty should look so,' and though 'music hath a more pleasing sound' than her voice, yet 'I love to hear her speak.' Further, Dr. Brandes tells us, 'there still exists on the monument of Mary Fitton's mother in Gawsworth Church, in Cheshire, a highly coloured bust of Mary Fitton herself. The colours are so well preserved that it is clear she must have been a marked brunette.' Of Clodia we know fewer particulars, partly, perhaps, because she was really beautiful, and a pretty woman is more easily described than one who is lovely, and partly because Catullus at twenty-three was too young to see any imperfection in a mistress ten years older than himself, whereas Shakespeare at the age of thirty-three was able calmly to criticise while he loved the maid-of-honour of nineteen. Catullus only speaks of Clodia as

perfect loveliness, and calls her his white goddess. Her enemies have told us of her burning eyes. An unfriendly critic might borrow two of Shakespeare's lines to describe her:

'A whitely wanton with a velvet brow,
With two pitch balls stuck in her face for eyes.'

The outward circumstances of the two ladies' lives are very similar: each held a high position, each was married, and each was false, not only to her husband, but to her lover. Marcus Caelius Rufus, the friend of Catullus and the lover of Clodia, finds his counterpart in William Herbert, afterwards Earl of Pembroke, the patron and friend of Shakespeare, and his successful rival for the love of Mary Fitton. A time came to both poets when their eyes were opened and each recognised the faithlessness of his mistress. Again the parallel is interesting. Catullus is

ready to pardon infidelities if they are but few and more or less concealed: and Shakespeare means much the same when he writes:

'Tell me thou lov'st elsewhere: but in my sight,
Dear heart, forbear to glance thine eye aside.'

But when the breach was complete and each found himself betrayed by his friend, while Shakespeare could forgive at once:

'I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief,
Although thou steal thee all my poverty,'

Catullus is wounded to the heart. It is true that before many years were passed he too came to realise that there was some excuse even for the friend who had betrayed him, when Clodia by her continued infamies had proved him, comparatively speaking, innocent. But no one can think the worse of Catullus for the bitterness of indignation

with which he turned upon the traitor friend, and no one will envy Shakespeare the facility with which he forgave his patron :

'Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all'—

How could he say it—our Shakespeare?

Of Rufus something remains to be told. When the civil war broke out in B.C. 50, he was found, against his professed political principles, on the revolutionary side, preferring the prospect of success with Caesar to the approval of Cicero and Cato. But he soon wearied of playing a secondary part, and in the mad effort to outbid and supersede Caesar appealed to the mob to follow him, and was punished for his foolish presumption by a violent death. To pity him is impossible; but it is difficult not to be fascinated by him even now in spite of all his faults, when we read the letters which he wrote to Cicero. During his whole career

he was popular with young and old: the gayest of the gay, yet none the less the trusted friend of statesmen, a man of extravagant ambition, yet always boyish and irresistibly attractive to the last. Is it strange if men loved him in his lifetime, and spoke gently of him when he was dead? He started with all the chances, and almost every brilliant gift: character alone was lacking; and want of principle ruined him even in that unprincipled age.

But it is time to return to Lesbia. Doubtless there were many quarrels and reconciliations between the two lovers in the year 59, and Catullus celebrates his restoration to his mistress' fickle favour in one of the happiest of his poems:

CVII.

If that which is the heart's desire be told
Unhoped for, it is joy beyond the rest,

Therefore I count it joy more dear than
gold,
That, love, you turn again and make me
blest;
You turn, my heart's desire so long denied,
Unasked, unhoped for. Oh! the white,
bright day!
What happiness in all the world beside
Is like to mine? The rapture who shall
say?

But for all this the old wounds were slow to heal, and Lesbia seems at last hardly to have wished to hide her own unfaithfulness. And so there came a day when Catullus struggled to be free:

VIII.

Catullus, hapless one, be schooled at last,
Believe your eyes, confess the past is past.
So bright, so white the suns that shone
before!
Then where your lady led you followed fain,

And loved her as none else shall love again.
Ah! then the glad surprises and the play—
You wished it so, nor said your lady nay.
So white, so bright the suns that shine no more.
Now says she nay. ah! weakling, say it too,
Nor live to grieve, nor one who flies pursue,
But stubborn stand and bear the purpose through.
Lady, good-bye! now stands Catullus fast,
Nor woos against your will nor mourns the past:
But surely you shall mourn when wooed no more.
Poor culprit! ah, the days for you in store!
Who now will heed your beauty, take your hand?
Whom will you fondle? who will call you his?
Whose lips will you devour with kiss on kiss?
But thou, Catullus, stubborn, steadfast stand.

It would have been well for Catullus if he could have followed his own judgment; but he still wavered, and at last revealed the secret of his sorrow in one of the shortest but most pathetic of his poems.

LXXXV.

I hate the while I love: how this be so,
Perchance you seek to know:
Ah! there I am not wise,
Only 'tis so I feel and agonise.

It is comparatively a slight thing when love turns to hate: it is only too common an experience, and the mischief is not fatal. But to hate the while we love, to love and to hate the same person at the same time, this way madness lies, or death. Not indeed for such men as Cloten in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, though he says, 'I hate and love her'; such as he can never really love or hate, and he is safe enough unless his own half-

witted presumption should lead him to his ruin. But Catullus loves and hates with his whole soul: such violent passions are shattering even when separate and distinct; but now love and hate are centred upon Clodia, and we cannot wonder that he should feel and agonise. It is the same with Othello; because he hates the while he loves we have a tragedy instead of a divorce or a reconciliation. 'O thou weed!' he cries in his anguish, 'who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet that the sense aches at thee, Would thou hadst ne'er been born!' and Iago tells the hateful truth when he whispers to Othello:

'What damned minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves!'

But to love and hate is worse than to dote yet doubt, and Catullus, who still loves while he hates Clodia, is in torment.

The poem which immediately precedes this confession in the traditional but wholly unintelligible arrangement of the poet's works offers a singular contrast to it. It is perhaps not unnatural, though it seems strangely modern, that some Romans should have been guilty of the vulgarity of unduly aspirating the vowels; but that the chief offender should by his name, Arrius, irresistibly recall his modern representative is almost too good to be true. And yet this is what Catullus tells us:

LXXXIV.

'*H*onours' for 'honours,' Arrius used to say,
'Hambush' for 'ambush,' in his happy way;
Proud lord of language, and more lordly still
Whene'er he gave his 'hambush' with a will.
Why not? his uncle Liber did the same,
Grandparents both and mother share the blame.

Well, he was sent to Syria, ears had rest,
By softer sounds and gentler tones caressed;
Our fears were laid aside, such words were
dead,
When on a day there came the tidings dread,
Arrius is here, the seas to Arrius bow,
And once Ionian are Hionian now.

To the same period, probably to the year 58, belongs that passionate appeal to the gods for deliverance, which, though unsurpassed in pathos and beauty, is even more astonishing for its reiterated assertion of a dutiful and innocent life. That Catullus had been more sinned against than sinning we might allow; but this would not content him: he says and he believes that he has never sinned at all.

LXXVI.

If there be happiness that haunts the thought
In after days of loyal service wrought,

Faith kept unsullied, hatred of deceit
That bids high Heaven be witness to a cheat,
In the far years, Catullus, you shall prove
Rich store of joy from this unthankful love.
For all the kindness ever said or done,
Love's many gifts, you lavished every one
To bless a thankless heart that scorns the prize:
Then what avails you still should agonise?
Nay, steal your heart, retrace your steps again,
And cease in Heaven's despite to suffer pain.
'Tis hard to end a year-long love to-day;
'Tis hard, achieve it then as best you may:
This victory win, this only safety trust,
Say not you cannot or you can—you must.
O gods! if you can pity, if in the past
You ever heard and succoured at the last,
Look on my woe, let innocence avail,
And save me from the love, my bane and bale,
Which steals within and deadens every part,

Murders each joy and masters all my heart.
I pray no more that love for love she give,
Or chaste (it cannot be) consent to live;
I would be whole, from shameful sickness freed.
O gods! of loyal love be this the meed.

Catullus was indeed in need of comfort, for at the time when Clodia had first proved herself unfaithful, far away in Asia his brother had died. The two blows had fallen in rapid succession, and life in Rome had now little charm for him: immediate change was necessary, and the poet seized the opportunity of going to Bithynia on the staff of the praetor Memmius. It may have been before he went to Bithynia or after his return that he wrote the pleading lines to Cornificius, a brother poet. Whatever the occasion, it is clear that Catullus was in need of comfort, and that the sympathy which he expected had been withheld. His friend's heart must

indeed have been of stone if he could resist this appeal:

XXXVIII.

Ill fares your own Catullus, ill;
Aye, Cornificius, in distress
That daily grows and hourly still.
And did you give (could aught be less?)
A word to soothe him overworn?
You chafe me, slighting love so fond—
Vouchsafe a single word beyond
Tears of Simonides forlorn.

To the same time may perhaps be assigned the poem addressed to Quintus Hortensius Ortalus, the great orator, rival and friend of Cicero, who had written, it seems, to Catullus urging him to let him have some verses which he had promised. The poet's answer is sad enough he is prostrate with grief at his brother's death, and his heart is far from the Muses, yet since he has given

his word he will send some versions of Callimachus, if these may suffice.

LXV.

Since care unceasing holds me sorrow-worn
Far from the scholar maidens, Ortalus,
How shall the Muses' dainty fruit be born
From fancies of a soul storm-shaken thus?—
My brother, 'tis but now the creeping wave
Moistens thy poor pale feet on Lethe's strand,
Whom, taken from our eyes, the whelming grave
Hides by Rhoeteum in the Trojan land.
No more to speak to thee, no more to hear
Thy language, brother mine, than life more dear,
See thee no more: but what I can, I will,
Love thee and sing and sorrow for thee still:

So Daulis' bird in leafy thickets lone
For Itys, murdered Itys, makes her moan.—
Yet out of such affliction, O my friend,
These versions of Callimachus I send,
Lest you should think that words of yours could be
Forgotten, given to wandering winds by me,
Forgotten, as a maiden may forget
The lover's secret apple-gift she set
Neath the soft folds that hide her bosom chaste,
And springs, ah! fond, forgetful one, in haste
To meet her mother, spilling it, and lo!
Sudden and sheer it leaps and lies below;
Spreads, saddening all her face, the tell-tale glow.

The poet went naturally enough with the rest of the staff in the train of the praetor Memmius, the unworthy patron to whom Lucretius dedicated his great work. He

returned by himself in a yacht of his own, and visited the famous cities on the coast of Asia as far south as Rhodes. He had expected, if we are to believe his own words, to make his fortune in Bithynia: if he failed in this, he succeeded at any rate in recovering his spirits and his health. There are few more buoyantly happy poems than that in which he says good-bye to Bithynia, when the winter is over and the spring has come. The whole poem is well worth quoting:

XLVI.

Spring—and the warmth has thawed the cold,
Spring—and the March winds overbold,
Lulled to glad Zephyrs, rage no more.
Catullus, leave the Phrygian plain
And parched Nicaea rich in grain,
Take wing for Asia's famous shore.
Spring stirs the heart to roam at will,

Spring bids the feet exultant thrill.
Sweet friends in fellowship from Rome
Who fared, adieu—we part, to come
By many ways and wanderings home.

How modern it all is! What better words could we choose to express the thrill of happiness which most of us have felt when we were starting to visit Italy and the famous towns, Verona among the rest, for the first time in the spring? And not less happy and not less convincing is the poem in which, his voyage over, he exults in the joy of coming home; for it is the special delight of travel, that however much we have enjoyed every day and every hour of our wanderings, none the less the home-coming is the best part of all, and the comfort of one's own room and one's own bed is never so dearly prized as after a month in Italy or in Greece. And Catullus just returned to Sirmio has felt this and expressed it once for all.

XXXI.

My pearl of mimic isles and island eyes,
That in the liquid lakes or wild waste seas
Neptune upholds the god of those and these,
My Sirmio, is it true, the glad surprise?
And have I left Bithynia's plains behind,
And Thynia left to see you and be safe?
Joy beyond joy to loose the cares that chafe
And lay aside the burden of the mind!
Home, home is ours, the weary wanderings o'er,
The bed we longed for ours, and rest once more,
Rich recompense alone for all we bore!
Joy, fairy Sirmio, for your master's sake:
Joy, waters of my own true Lydian lake:
Home-laughter of the depths awake, awake!

The poem, apart from its charm, is full of interest, as the earliest example of the sonnet. Calverley saw this long ago, and

his version of it in *Verses and Translations* is singularly beautiful. I have purposely altered the ordinary form of the sextet in the hope of faithfully reproducing the effect of the original, in which the last three lines are each separate and distinct, recalling, as a friend suggests to me, three wavelets of the Lydian lake. But why the Lydian lake? Here again Calverley, who renders it 'the golden mere,' and Calverley alone, has interpreted the poet aright. Catullus, we must remember, had just returned from Asia Minor, and he can hardly have failed to visit the Pactolus, the golden Lydian stream, and when he sees the Lago di Garda before him and realises perhaps more fully than ever before its full charm and beauty, he feels that the true Lydian waters of gold are not in Asia far away, but close to his own Sirmio in the dear Italian lake. One other allusion to this passage is interesting. Tennyson in his Sirmione poem speaks of

himself as 'gazing at the Lydian laughter of the Garda lake below.' I have often wondered what meaning he gave to Lydian. Is it possible that the music of the waves suggested to him soft Lydian measures? It may be so: but I do not think that Catullus intended this. Yet no one understood Catullus so well as Tennyson or loved him more: witness his 'tenderest of Roman poets nineteen hundred years ago.'

On the outward voyage Catullus had visited his brother's grave, and had written there the poem which is linked imperishably with his memory. Certainly many English readers who do not know Catullus are familiar with the words which consecrate the '*ave atque vale* of the poet's hopeless woe.' We may stop, if we will, to praise the stately march of the opening line, or the pathos of the close; but the secret of the poem lies in this: Catullus is speaking from his heart to ours.

CI.

From land to land, o'er many waters borne,
Brother, I come to these thy rites forlorn,
The latest gift, the due of death, to pay,
The fruitless word to silent dust to say.
Since death has reft thy living self from me,
Poor brother, stolen away so cruelly,
Yet this the while, which ancient use decrees
Sad ritual of our sires for obsequies,
Take, streaming with a brother's tears that tell
The last of greeting, brother, and farewell.

Catullus had now lost by death or estrangement his brother, his mistress, and his friend; but he had true friends as well as false, and Licinius Calvus must have made amends for Caelius Rufus. All one long night the poet lay awake, he tells us, thinking of Calvus, with whom he had spent the happiest of evenings over the walnuts and the wine. But Catullus shall give his own story:

L.

Licinius, yesterday at leisure
We filled my tablets with our rhymes,
Such pretty pastime was our pleasure.
Each answered each a thousand times
In ever-changing lyric strain,
Then laughed and drank and laughed again.
Thence with the wit the charm aflame,
Your charm, Licinius, home I came
Unhappy, whom nor food could please,
Nor slumber give my eyelids ease,
But to and fro deliriously
I turned the wishèd dawn to see,
With you to talk, with you to be.
But when the limbs that tossed and tossed
Half dead were on the pallet laid,
For you to learn my sorrow's cost,
My pleasant friend, this song I made.
Then be not overbold, take warning,
Light of my eyes, nor spurn my prayer,
Lest Nemesis answer scorn with scorning,
Stern goddess: whom to chafe beware.

All beautiful things, if we are to believe Catullus, were very dear to both the poets, and certainly one very ugly man, Caesar's *protégé* Vatinius, was fiercely hated by both. Calvus brought him to trial more than once, and attacked him so violently that poor Vatinius sprang to his feet with the almost involuntary interruption, 'Am I to be condemned because he is so eloquent?' And Catullus was hardly more merciful. Vatinius, whom he attacks in company with an almost unknown Nonius, had the misfortune to be scrofulous, but was good-tempered enough to make fun of his own deformity. He was probably unwise to boast of his consulship before being elected, yet there was some justification even for this, as Pompey and Caesar in 56 B.C. drew up a list of those who were to hold office for some years to come, and Vatinius may have seen it. In any case, these are the two points on which Catullus seizes—the man's personal disfig-

urement, and his habit of swearing by his consulship. It is difficult to see why Nonius is introduced into the epigram, but perhaps the reason may be this: 'Carbuncled' would inevitably suggest Vatinius, but he is reprieved for a moment and might hope to have escaped; his name is, however, reserved for the end of the third line with crushing effect.

LII.

How now, Catullus? die and end despair:
Carbuncled Nonius holds a curule chair:
By office dreamed Vatinius swears the lie:
How now, Catullus? end despair and die.

It is worth noticing that Catullus often addresses himself as he does here ('How now, Catullus?') when he is deeply affected, whether

pleasure or indignation be the moving cause. And there is hardly anything that Catullus can view indifferently or dispassionately : he is always in a fever of love or hate : but ugly, good-humoured Vatinius lived to be consul after all, and perhaps forgave Catullus, who by that time had been already seven years in his grave.

But to return to Calvus. He had much in common with Catullus ; but between the two friends there was this great difference : one had a wife whom he dearly loved, and the other had only a cruel mistress. Long before the death of Catullus, Clodia had fallen very low indeed, and counted her lovers by hundreds ; but Quintilia, the wife of Calvus, was dead. Catullus, when he heard the sad news, wrote a few words of comfort and sent them to his friend ; and I doubt if there is any lyric more touching in its sorrowful affection than this :

XCVI.

If any solace, any joy may fall,
Calvus, to silent sepulchres through tears,
When the lost love regretful we recall
And weep the parted friend of early years,
Then, sure, Quintilia is not wholly sad,
Untimely lost: your love has made her glad.

But it is time to come to the famous marriage song, the model and the despair of every poet who has written an epithalamium from that day to this. It was sung at the marriage of Manlius Torquatus and Vinia Aurunculeia, both of whom were friends of the poet, and he himself is present to wish them happiness. The poem is a marvel of dignity and grace, and yet it is Roman throughout and not Greek. If a few words of explanation are necessary, it is not that any part is obscure, for the whole is as simple as it is beautiful, but a knowledge of the

Roman wedding ceremonies is of course taken for granted by Catullus. The points that concern us are briefly these: The bride is almost a child, perhaps not more than twelve years of age; she wears a white robe (bound round the waist with a girdle which the husband unties), a yellow veil, and yellow shoes, and in our poem the god of marriage is represented as wearing the same dress. In the evening the bride is taken with a show of force from her mother's arms, and, accompanied by two young boys who hold her arms (in the poem one boy only is mentioned), she is led to her husband's house. There the chorus is waiting to welcome her; she is lifted over the threshold, met by her husband, and, after the banquet, is brought by the boys to the brideswomen, and by them carried to the bridal couch.

It may at first sight seem strange to compare this poem with the 45th Psalm, but any one who will take the trouble to study

the two will see how striking the likeness is. That psalm is, as is well known, only a marriage song, though our translation unfortunately disguises this by introducing an appeal to God in the seventh verse. And the arrangement of the different parts in our poem and in the psalm is almost identically the same; the only difference being that the psalmist praises the bridegroom first and then turns to the bride, whereas Catullus first addresses the bride and afterwards the bridegroom. The actual words used are very similar in both cases: compare first the psalmist's counsel to the bride to forget her own relations and worship her husband, with the summons in Catullus to a new home and an absorbing love, and then the praise of the bridegroom in the psalm, 'fairer than the children of men,' whose lips are 'full of grace,' with the welcome which Catullus gives him as 'the favourite of Venus,' and 'not less beautiful than the bride.' In both cases

children are promised: in Catullus, the child-bride is taken from her mother's bosom, but she will be a mother herself soon with a child on her own bosom to make amends; and in the psalm a like blessing is foretold in the words: 'Instead of thy fathers thou shalt have children, whom thou mayest make princes in all lands.'

LXI.

God, of Urania son,
Haunter of Helicon,
Who, to the husband's side
Snatching a tender bride,
Hear'st Hymen, Hymen, cried;

Thy flowery brows around
Marjoram sweet be bound,
Come with the joy aglow,
Come with the veil we know,
Yellow shoes, feet of snow.

Come, on this happy day,
Singing the marriage lay,
Raise the song shrill and sweet,
Wave the pine torch, and beat
Earth with thy frolic feet.

As by the Phrygian seen,
Venus, Idalian queen,
So Vinia comes to thee,
Manlius, a bride to be,
Blessed with blessed augury,

Blossoming brightly now
As Asian myrtle-bough,
Myrtle, the sweet plaything
Which from the dewy spring
Wood nymphs are watering.

Come then, we pray thee, come
From rocky Thespian home,
Come from Aonian caves
Which with the falling waves
Cold Aganippe laves.

Home's mistress homeward call,
Bid the new love enthral
Thoughts that were unconfined,
As ivy tendrils bind
All the tree close-entwined.

You too the fancy-free,
Maidens that soon shall see
Dawn a like day, repeat
Hymen, Hymen, and greet
Hymen to music's beat.

So may he gladly hear,
So at the sound draw near
Unto his proper deed,
Fain the true love to lead,
Fain the true hearts to speed.

What god as he can bless
Lovers in love's distress?
First of the heavenly throng,
Men's prayers to thee belong,
Hymen, Hymen our song.

Thee to their children's aid
Call failing sires; a maid
Loosens for thee her zone;
Bridegrooms to thee alone
All fears and longings own.

Love without thee is vain,
Lustreless all the gain,
Yet if thou wilt, 'tis fair:
Which of the gods may dare
With Hymen to compare?

Houses with sons are blest,
Fathers on children rest
Only if thou be there:
Which of the gods may dare
With Hymen to compare?

Open the gate: 'tis she.
Torches are waving, see,
Tresses of light, yet slow
Moves she, and all aglow
Weeps that she needs must go.

Sweet, you have wept enow:
Aurunculeia, how
Should there be feared by you
Lovelier eyes to view
Dawn dripping ocean dew?

Gold feet with omen fair
Over the threshold bear,
Pass through the bright doorway—
Only to thee to-day,
Hymen, Hymen, we pray.

Drop the girl's tender hand
Boy with the purple band:
Let the men claim her now:
Hymen, to thee we bow,
Hymen, be gracious thou.

Wives that are aged and proved
True to the lords ye loved,
Lay the sweet girl to rest:
Hymen, thy name be blest,
Hymen, thy praise confessed.

Come to her now, for she
Waits to be thine, and see
So sweet a blossom this
As the white clematis
Or yellow poppy is.

Haste to her husband now
Comely as she, I vow;
Venus has held you dear:
Only delay not here:
Come to her, night is near.

Quickly you come indeed,
Venus befriend your need,
Since what you will you dare,
Heedless of whosoe'er
Looks on a love so fair.

Dust of the Afric plain
Reckon we grain by grain,
Count we the stars that shine:
Joys that are thine and thine,
How shall our hearts divine?

Happy be night and morn,
Soon shall a babe be born;
How should an ancient name,
Still to abide the same,
Lack the new heir to fame?

O for a son to rest
Safe on his mother's breast!
Outstretching hands so sweet,
Flickering lips, and fleet
Love-smile, a sire to greet.

Father in son shall live,
Father to son shall give
Feature and form, to move
Wonder in all, and prove
Pledge of a wife's true love.

Mother shall lend him grace,
Sign of his ancient race,
Such as the praise we see
Rest on thy son from thee,
Matchless Penelope.

Close ye the doors; away,
Maidens, enough of play;
You, that have youth to share,
Cherish a love so fair
Happily, happy pair.

But it is time to come to the most interesting and the most famous of the poet's contemporaries, Marcus Tullius Cicero and Gaius Julius Caesar.

Catullus probably brought with him to Rome an introduction to Cicero: Caesar he had known before at Verona as his father's friend. It is difficult not to feel a sense of almost personal disappointment at the thought of what might have been, if Catullus had found, before meeting Clodia, a woman who could have saved him, as Juliet saved Romeo. That there were such women at Rome, even in that age of profligacy, who can doubt? Cicero's daughter, Tulliola, as he loves to call her, using the tender diminu-

tive, was one of these. Had Catullus loved Tullia, two lives that made shipwreck might have been saved, for Tullia herself was unhappy enough; and though she died before her father, two of the three husbands whom she married in rapid succession were worthless men. If only Cicero had chosen Catullus for his son-in-law, we should have lost Lesbia's sparrow and Lesbia's kisses, but we should have gained nobler poems inspired by a good woman's love, and Catullus might have risen to Virgil's height instead of sinking at times to the level of Ovid and Propertius. But it was not to be: one poem alone remains addressed to Cicero, and, curiously enough, it is uncertain whether it was written in irony or in genuine gratitude. The words are these:

XLIX.

Mark Tully, in the long descent
From Romulus, most eloquent

Of all that are or once have been
Or shall in other years be seen,
The last in all the poet ranks,
Catullus pays you hearty thanks,
Of poets all the last, as far
As you the first of pleaders are.

The reasons generally given for believing the poem to be ironical are these. Cicero, it has been suggested, in his defence of Vatinius alluded to his client's enemies, Calvus and Catullus, as bad poets or the worst of poets, and Catullus accepted the challenge. Cicero is so far the best of advocates as he is the worst of poets; but if he should prove to be the best of poets, it is obvious that Cicero will sink in the scale as Catullus rises. Yet on the whole it seems safer to suppose that Catullus means what he says when he acknowledges his gratitude to Cicero, first, because when he insults an enemy he does not usually leave his meaning doubtful, and secondly,

because he would not be likely to attack Cicero in the one point where he was obviously unassailable. Cicero the worst of pleaders? If so, Caesar might be called the worst of generals; yet Catullus said everything bad of Caesar, but not that.

When Catullus hated he hated with his whole soul; and he acted with a consistency which perhaps no one before or since has ever equalled, on the principle that all is fair in love and war. And so shamelessly and ceaselessly he pelted with mud the greatest of the Romans; and Caesar, who was too wise to undervalue the effect of the words of a great poet, paid him the compliment of being wounded by his attacks, and then forgave him. We admire the wisdom and condescension of Caesar, who wished to be reconciled to Catullus; yet it is difficult not to feel some sort of respect for the courage of the poet who could write:

XCIII.

Not overmuch I care,
Caesar, your friend to be;
You may be dark or fair,
I never looked to see.

Catullus 'never looked to see,' and yet, nineteen hundred years after the death of Caesar, we care so much. 'His eyes were dark and piercing,' says Suetonius, 'and his complexion fair,' and because he gives us details about Caesar such as these Suetonius is still read and valued to-day. But Catullus had the courage of his convictions, and we cannot help admiring the astonishing impudence which stands in such welcome contrast to the servility of the next generation. For within thirty years from this time, even Virgil, 'the chastest poet and royalest that to the memory of man is known,' addressed Augustus as a god, suggesting that Neptune would be willing to resign in his favour the empire of the

seas; while Horace, for all his sturdy independence of character, sang of him enthroned between Pollux and Hercules, drinking nectar with rosy mouth, and it never seems to have occurred to any Roman that the court poets were making the emperor ridiculous. Their predictions were, however, almost literally fulfilled by the criminal lunatic Caligula, who drove across the bay of Baiae on a causeway made for the purpose, and offered himself to be worshipped by his subjects as he stood in the temple of Castor and Pollux, embracing with one arm the statue of either god. Catullus misjudged and insulted Caesar, but he did not succeed in making him ridiculous: Caesar understood the poet, and pardoned him. It is only fair to add that Catullus is said to have asked to be forgiven; but the epithet 'great' which he gives to Caesar in one of the latest of his poems is the sole evidence they furnish of the poet's repentance.

To the year 55 B.C. belongs the exquisite love-poem, 'Acme and Septimius.' 'At the moment when the poem was written,' says Munro, 'Caesar was invading Britain, and Crassus was off *partant pour la Syrie* to annihilate the Parthians'; and Professor Ellis reminds us that in the same year the 'glare of the lion' became familiar at Rome, since no fewer than six hundred were exhibited at the famous games, when the sight of the wounded elephants made so deep an impression on the spectators that they rose to their feet in tears and cursed Pompey. But Septimius recks little of the triumphs and the shows of the triumvirs, with Acme in his arms; and Acme has no thought beyond her boy lover.

XLV.

Septimius unto Acme laid,
The loved one, on his bosom, said:

'My Acme, if I be not lost
In sheer devotion, if I falter
In thought of love, nor time can alter,
Nor he surpass who loves the most,
May I alone in Libya bare
Or Ind confront a lion's glare.'
The lover spoke: left sentinel,
Love rightward sneezed that all was well.
But Acme softly turned her head,
The sweet boy's eyes love-delugèd
Kissed with the shining lips, and said,
'Septimius, all my life's desire,
So serve we this one lord for ever,
As stronger, fiercer far the fever
Consumes this melting heart with fire.'
She spoke: again, left sentinel,
Love rightward sneezed that all was well.
Oh! happy augury of bliss,
His heart is hers, and hers is his.
Septimius all the world refuses,
Fond boy, and Acme only chooses:

Septimius only Acme treasures,
True heart, for all desires and pleasures:
Were ever mortals happier seen,
Or Venus wearing fairer mien?

The poem is irresistible as the glorification of a light, sensuous love: but is this all? Has the tenderest of Roman poets no other, no higher message to give than this? Is the mission of woman only to delight, and never to raise and ennoble the man she loves, so that he shall be capable of devotion and self-sacrifice? It is clear that Catullus no longer dreams of such possibilities, and the reason is not far to seek. Could Clodia teach him self-denial? Could she inspire a chivalrous love? Some women might have saved him and shown him the truth: there were such wives in Rome. But married happiness was not destined for Catullus, and so the poet of love died, and left us no record of any woman whom we can reverence.

Instead of the soft radiance that clings like a halo to Virgil's heroine, the warrior maid Camilla, burns the baleful light of Clodia's insolent beauty, which drew Catullus like a moth to the flame.

The end was not far off now. Catullus, reconciled to Caesar, had become a person of some importance at Rome; and Clodia, who perhaps dreamed of fascinating the triumvirs, and still aspired to influence the politics of the world, seems to have made advances, through the mediation of Furius and Aurelius, to her former lover. Her messengers were ill chosen, though nominally friends of Catullus, with whom they professed to be willing to go anywhere, to venture anything. The poet understood the worth of their professions, and the reason why Clodia had sent them. Again we are reminded of Shakespeare. 'Why look you now,' says Hamlet to his 'excellent good friends,' Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who

have been sent by the king to discover the cause of his affliction, 'how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops. . . . 'S blood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.' Clodia's messengers are not more successful, and Catullus, after quoting with unconcealed contempt their promises of heroic devotion, sends them away on a slight errand to do dishonour to Clodia. And this is the last message they are to carry from him to her.

XI.

Furius, and you, Aurelius, who have vowed
To follow fearless, though Catullus reach
Far India ringed with Eastern surge and loud
With roaring beach,

Or languid Arabs or Hyrcanians brave,
Sacae or Parthians ever bearing bows,
Or where the Nile incarnadines the wave
And sevenfold flows;

Or scale afoot the lofty Alpine bar,
Viewing the realms that Caesar's greatness tell,
Gaul and the Rhine and angry seas afar
Where Britons dwell;—

Oh! you resolved all this with me to bear,
And what the gods may will in other days,
A little message to my lady bear,
No gentle phrase.

Bid her live on, thrive still with all her train,
Enfold her hundred minions and enthral,
Loving none truly, though at whiles she drain
The lives of all:

Nor let her look to find my love is there,
Which now through sin of hers is fallen indeed,
As some lone flower touched by the passing share
That skirts the mead.

Is there any contrast in all literature more wonderful than the change from fierceness to tenderness in the last two stanzas?

The reference to the conquest of Britain among Caesar's victories makes it almost certain that this poem was not written before 54 B.C., and probably in the course of this year the poet died. It is therefore possible that in this farewell to Lesbia we have the last words of Catullus.

It remains only to say something of the poet's character, and to give some estimate of his poetry. Was Catullus a bad man judged by the standard of his age? We shall not say so if we trust his own evidence.

'The poet's life,' he says, 'must be chaste, not his poems.' It is true that Ovid and Martial, both notoriously bad men, said the same thing, but they could not have expected to be believed: they said it because it was the conventional thing for a poet to say, because Catullus, whom they both loved and imitated, had said it before them. But Catullus never did or said anything because it was conventional: and if he asserted his life to be pure he must have believed it to be so. Purity, as understood by the poet and his contemporaries, would sanction much which we condemn as impure. But men must be judged by the standard of their own generation, and with this reservation we may accept the assertion of Catullus as the truth.

In any case, we cannot admit his verses as evidence against the character of others. Outrageous language was the fashion then, and if even Cicero, the model of propriety,

never hesitated to use it, what else could we expect from Catullus?

And when we pass from words to deeds, we recognise in him a poet richly dowered with the gifts of love and hate: a loyal friend and faithful lover, a true patriot and fearless enemy of those whom he regarded, rightly or wrongly, as the enemies of the State—a man for whom, in spite of all his faults, we can still feel sympathy and affection. But the words in which he sums up the story of his love for Lesbia are still, when all is said, his best defence:

LXXXVII.

Was never one could say, so loved was she
As, Lesbia, thou by me:
Was never heart to covenant so true
As mine to love of you.

What place are we to assign to Catullus among the poets? We must recognise the narrowness of his range, the absence of high ideals, the triviality of his themes, which exclude him from a place among the greatest writers of the world. Yet for all this there is no love-poetry like his till we come to *Romeo and Juliet*, and there has been nothing since to rival it, not even Mrs. Browning's sonnets and Tennyson's *Maud*. Shakespeare, who, far more than Sophocles, 'saw life steadily and saw it whole,' and Catullus, who saw but a single side, alone attain perfection here, because they alone are absolutely true. We can pick out the beautiful points in other poems, and praise them as Catullus praises Quintia, 'fair, and straight, and tall,' but when we read, 'It is my soul that calls upon my name,' or 'My light, because you live, my life is sweet,' we feel that criticism is impossible and praise impertinent. And Shakespeare certainly reminds

us of Catullus, not only in great single lines such as,

'To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,'

which is almost identical with

'This day, and that, and the next, and the next,'

and gives the same vista of futurity, but in whole passages, as, for example, where Troilus and Cressida vie with one another in protests of love, which recall at once the passionate vows of Acme and Septimius. Therefore, if love-poetry is to be read at all—and the world would be immeasurably poorer for the loss of it, whatever 'elder, sourer men' may say—it is to Shakespeare and Catullus, above all others, that lovers will always turn, because they alone convince us that as they have written 'so should such things be.' We need not question Virgil's pre-eminence among Roman authors,

and even he would hardly rank higher than sixth among the poets of the world; yet as some of those who acknowledge Shakespeare's 'indivisible supremacy' give to Christina Rossetti a love which even the greatest cannot command, so, without injustice to Virgil, without disloyalty to Keats and Shelley, we may keep for wayward, passionate Catullus a place apart in our hearts.

HADRIAN'S LAST WORDS

Wayful, playful spirit-thing,
Body's guest and comrade, say
Whither wilt thou fare to-day,
Blanched and bare and shuddering,
Quite forgetting all thy play?

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